



News Release

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TWO-THIRDS OF KINDERGARTENERS IN STATE'S 'HIGH-PRIORITY' SCHOOLS LACK SKILLS TO SUCCEED

First 5 California provides \$30 million to expand preschool services to 30,000 more kids

SACRAMENTO—A study released today by First 5 California found that only a third of children entering kindergarten in the state's high-priority¹ schools possess the developmental skills necessary for school success, such as following two-step directions, understanding that letters make up words, and interacting with adults and peers appropriately.

Research demonstrates that children who do not acquire important developmental skills in their early years are more likely to be retained, have behavior problems, and/or be referred to special education.

"The findings are a wake-up call for educators, children's advocates and families across California," said First 5 California Chair Rob Reiner. "Through our School Readiness and Preschool for All efforts we have made significant strides to better prepare our children to succeed in school. Our efforts include providing guidance and resources to more than 1.5 million parents and children, as well as providing quality preschool opportunities throughout the state. These steps, however, are only the foundation for what we need to accomplish in the coming months and years. Clearly a great deal more needs to be done."

The study revealed that children who took part in early childhood education programs performed better than those who did not attend such programs. The results also showed that children whose parents read to them regularly achieved relatively higher levels of competency in the areas identified by the study. These findings join a growing

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¹ High priority schools are those with academic performance indexes in the lower three of 10 deciles.

body of scientific research showing the benefits of preschool and early childhood education programs, as these children are less likely to engage in risky behavior later in life, more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to get in trouble with the law.

To help address the needs of children identified in the study, First 5 California today allocated more than \$30 million to implement the voluntary Preschool for All program in seven counties including Merced, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Ventura, and Yolo counties. The funds will increase the availability and quality of preschool programs for nearly 30,000 additional children and will help increase access to a quality preschool education and the resources necessary for future success (see Table 1).

Conducted as part of the First 5 California School Readiness (SR) Initiative, the study reinforced the relationship between overall health and school readiness, finding that children in fair or poor health had mastered fewer developmental skills when compared to healthier peers. The study also found that the SR Initiative, which has provided more than \$400 million to prepare children to enter school, is targeting the communities that need it most. The first of its kind in California, the initiative helps young children and their families be better prepared for school success by: (1) ensuring that children are healthy and well nourished, (2) providing parent education, (3) developing children's language skill, (4) fostering and developing pre-reading and writing skills, and (5) supporting the development of social and emotional skills. First 5 California's School Readiness Initiative operates in communities served by nearly 800 schools statewide.

"By assessing nearly 10,000 kids in 133 schools across the state, the First 5 statewide evaluation is helping us to better identify and address the needs of California children," said Donna Spiker, program manager of SRI's early childhood program in the Center for Education and Human Services. SRI conducted the Kindergarten Entry Profile study.

A summary of the results can be accessed online by clicking the 2004 link of the Kindergarten Entry Profile section of: <http://www.first5eval.com/index.asp?pg=8>.

About First 5 California

Dedicated to improving the lives of children under the age of 5, First 5 California (also known as the California Children and Families Commission) and the 58 County Commissions were established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998,

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adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. For more information, visit their Web site at www.ccfcc.ca.gov.

About SRI International

Silicon Valley-based SRI International is one of the world's leading independent research and technology development organizations. Founded as Stanford Research Institute in 1946, SRI has been meeting the strategic needs of clients for almost 60 years. The nonprofit research institute performs contract research and development for government agencies, commercial businesses and private foundations. In addition to conducting contract R&D, SRI licenses its technologies, forms strategic partnerships and creates spin-off companies.

Table 1: First 5 California Preschool for All County Funding

County	Funds Awarded	Approximate New and Increased Preschool Spaces (After 1 Year)	Approximate New and Increased Preschool Spaces (After 5 Years)
Merced	\$2,446,600	378	1,687
San Francisco	\$13,779,203	978	4,806
San Joaquin	\$5, 825, 100	533	5,314
San Mateo	\$4,580,300	1,361	8,042
Santa Clara	\$2,364,450	1,005	5,027
Ventura	\$1,212,450	130	643
Yolo	\$688,700	0	1,290
TOTAL	\$30,896,803	4,385	26,809

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